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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000046

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#) [MASS](#)

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE AUTHORITIES CAPTURE KEY TERRORIST IN  
MINDANAO

REF: A. 2008 MANILA 2677 - PHILIPPINE OPERATIONS IN  
SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES PRODUCING RESULTS

[B](#). 2005 MANILA 727 - ASG

[C](#). JI SUSPECTS IN VALENTINE'S DAY BOMBINGS

Classified By: CDA Paul W. Jones, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: Philippine authorities conducted a joint operation on January 7 that resulted in the capture of a Jemaah Islamiyah facilitator wanted for murder in the 2005 Valentine's Day bombing in Davao and suspected of planning numerous other bombings, assassinations, and extortion activities. Elements of Philippine security forces and intelligence agencies apprehended Omar Venancio, a close associate of Bali bomber Umar Patek, near the city of Cotabato in central Mindanao after a weeklong buildup that highlighted the increasing ability of Philippine institutions to work together in counterterrorism efforts. U.S. personnel provided intelligence and planning assistance for the operation, a role which should remain confidential. Philippine authorities have not yet made the capture public, as they conduct interrogations for leads on other significant terrorists. This operation occurred after a series of bombings and attacks by insurgents and criminal groups against government and civilian targets December 18 - January 5 in the southern Philippines. Philippine forces continue to press the fight against rogue Moro Islamic Liberation Front forces in Mindanao, while maintaining operations against Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah members in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. END SUMMARY.

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JOINT OPERATION SCORES HIT AGAINST KEY TERRORISTS  
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[2](#). (C) In a strong display of effective joint operations, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippine intelligence agencies planned and executed an operation on January 7 that resulted in the arrest of prominent Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) facilitator Omar Venancio. The operation was conducted after more than a week of planning and reconnaissance in central of Mindanao and included elements of the U.S.-trained and equipped Joint Special Operations Group Light Reaction Company. Acting on information regarding Venancio's whereabouts, the AFP mobilized forces and coordinated intelligence with Philippine intelligence agencies to locate and capture Venancio.

[3](#). (C) Omar Venancio and his brother, Ansar, are suspected of masterminding the 2005 Valentine's Day bombing of a bus station in Davao City that killed five persons; the Philippine government has issued warrants for their arrest (ref B). Long affiliated with the Moro Islamic Liberation

Front-Special Operations Group, the Venancios have assisted the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and Philippine-based elements of JI -- both U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations -- with operational planning and logistics for terrorist attacks.

14. (C) The Philippine military has been targeting the Venancios since 2005, and the brothers have escaped several military and police raids over the last four years. The Philippine government has offered a five million peso reward (approximately USD 110,000) for the arrest or capture of each of the brothers. The January 7 operation, quietly supported by U.S. personnel, illustrates the improved ability of the Philippine government to utilize multiple tools in the fight against transnational terrorists and comes on the heels of other successes, including the capture of Indonesian JI member Hajiruddin Dansalan November 2 and an AFP offensive against ASG forces on Jolo and Basilan December 7 that killed an estimated 50 terrorists (ref A).

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SPATE OF HOLIDAY ATTACKS POINT TO CONTINUED CHALLENGES  
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15. (C) The success by Philippine authorities against Omar Venancio capped a violent two-week period that began December 18 with twin bombings in Iligan, a city in northern Mindanao, at commercial establishments, killing two and wounding 55 others. Through January 5, a series of bombings and attacks by rogue MILF commands, ASG fighters, and criminal groups against civilian and military targets left four dead and 129 injured throughout Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. In six

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other incidents, prompt and effective action by Philippine military and police rendered multiple improvised explosive devices safe, thereby preventing additional casualties. Philippine and U.S. analysts believe insurgents and criminals may have taken advantage of a reduced Philippine security posture during the holidays to carry out a combination of terrorist attacks and extortion activities.

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) The up-tick in violence by terrorists and insurgents during the last half of December juxtaposed with the blow Philippine authorities delivered in apprehending Omar Venancio emphasizes the complexity of the security situation in the southern Philippines. On one hand, Philippine authorities increasingly are able to integrate operations to effect coordinated strikes against terrorist groups, as has occurred on several occasions during the last two years. At the same time, the December attacks highlight the complex and deadly societal mix prevalent in Mindanao -- clan rivalry, known terrorists, and opportunists pressing for an advantage in the uncertain environment following the breakdown of the peace negotiations in August 2008. The interwoven affiliations between the various different ethnic and political elements are a major challenge for the Philippine government in its efforts to provide security while renewing negotiation of a political settlement that satisfies all parties in the southern Philippines. The Mission continues to work with the Philippine government through development and military assistance to address these challenges.

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